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# Veracity: A Work of Fiction

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I will be an integrated strategic communications senior at the University of Kentucky. I am a member of Phi Eta Sigma, Golden Key National Honor Society, and a previously published author in *Kaleidoscope*. As an advertising major, creativity is a must — and I explore this through two of my favorite hobbies, writing and playing piano. I also enjoy reading, listening to music, swimming, and spending time with friends and family.

"Veracity" was written over the course of several months and has seen no fewer than five drafts. The story uses a limited omniscient 'third-person' point of view to show the inner thoughts and turmoil of the main character, Isabelle, as she sits through her father's funeral. Flashbacks are used to show the close relationship between the father and daughter and what she learns from these events. Isabelle's frustrations and anger about the funeral become evident through her interactions with the various characters who are sent to check on her, until finally, at the end, she finds someone who truly understands how she feels. My faculty mentor, Nikky Finney, was a great help to me in the writing process, always willing to read over new material and critique it for me. She helped me better understand my characters, which allowed the story to flow more easily and take on a life of its own. As all great teachers do, she assisted me without being too intrusive.

I would like to thank several people who helped along the way — Nikky Finney, Christie Perry, Aaron Shraberg, and the members of my English 407 class, who all took the time to read through the story and offer me their thoughts and criticisms.



**Mentor:**  
Nikky Finney,  
Associate Professor,  
English Department

I find the significance and quality of "Veracity" to be clear, distinct, and provocative. The language: lucent and lively. The theme: engaging and quietly sincere. The daughter character of Isabelle Atkins is the energy and engine of the plotline. The writer wonderfully illuminates her emotional distance and paternal longing in vibrant non-predictable ways. As readers, we are brought into the world of the story straightaway. Perry's knowledge and use of mathematics, her close description of the funeral and of those who have come to pay their last respects, is metaphorically significant. Her flashbacks of family and girlhood moments offer astute historical references to the real-time, upheaval-moment of the story in present tense. In the end, I believe, the power of this story lives in its ideals of ritual, tradition, and truth telling; not the truth that is on top but the truth that is unembellished and far sweeter than anything made of simple kindness and hypocritical expected gratitude. In the case of "Veracity" that core truth is painstakingly paced and revealed by an unsocial daughter's noble memory of her father.

## Veracity

### A work of fiction

### Author's Note

Nearly everyone has attended a funeral at some point in their life. We're all accustomed to the kind of behavior that's considered acceptable in a funeral setting — the soft, kind words and happy, positive memories that are shared. The main character of "Veracity" disregards traditional behaviors when she is at her father's funeral, yet shows to the reader that she is honoring his memory in the best way she knows how.



It was the smell that got to her first.

The sheer thickness of it choked her. It didn't matter that the A/C was going full force, the soft, insistent hum nearly drowned out by hushed whispers and sniffles. She lowered her head, gray eyes burning a trail through the cheap blue carpet as she shoved her way through the dense, suffocating crowd. Her elbows brushed across various fabrics: silk, cotton, polyester, wool... all dyed a somber black or navy blue. She was sick of looking at those fabrics, those colors, and even more so of the people belonging to them. She'd had enough of their sad, sympathetic eyes, their red, swollen cheeks, and their forced, watery smiles. And then, of course, the smell. The sickeningly sweet scent that emanated from the floral bouquets and seemed to mock her. It was powerful, overbearing, trying desperately to cover up the situation. She wasn't fooled. Death, she knew, did not really smell like roses.

This wasn't how he would have wanted it.

She heard the angry murmurs behind her as she wrestled through the field of mourners, but chose to ignore them. She was drowning, flailing in a dark sea of well-meaning relatives and so-called "friends." She had to get out.

Her eyes lifted for the briefest moment, searching for an escape. She could see none, her short stature severely limiting her horizon even when she stood on her toes. The main door appeared to be blocked, hidden behind a wall created by a stocky couple — Tweedledee and a blubbering Tweedledum. Knowing she would never breach that barricade, she swiftly spun on black pumps and resumed her search.



She stumbled past one of her great aunts — or was it her second cousin? The polished wood of a church pew jammed into her shin as she changed direction; she bit back a scream. Lifting her head again, she breathed deeply and allowed a grim smile when she saw a silvery metal door frame that led out into the hall. Eyes fixed, she marched toward it. Her getaway came to a halt when a wiry, warm hand gripped her shoulder, first startling her, then annoying her. She teetered forward on unsteady toes, her momentum pushing against the hand that held her. "Where are you going?"

She refused to turn around. "Out."

"Out?"

"Yes. Out," she repeated, shrugging him off and plucking an invisible hair from her shoulder. She glanced back at him, her eyes smoldering.

"You should be up there with your mother," her uncle said, giving her his best stern, fatherly look. She narrowed her eyes as he continued. "She's been up there by herself all day."

"Then why don't *you* go stand with her?"

He fixed her with a glare that would have caused a lesser girl to back down. "First off, he wasn't *my* father. Secondly, everyone has been wondering why you're not up there greeting with her. It looks bad."

She didn't like his attitude, but two could play at that game. "First off, your powers of observation never cease to amaze, and secondly, everyone else can fuck off."

Before he could come up with an appropriately scathing response, she darted out of reach and dashed through the door, her black velvet skirt brushing against the doorframe as she finally escaped.

There were more mourners out in the hall, but the crowd was considerably thinner. She slowed her steps, carefully surveying the surroundings, looking for someplace that would offer a little solitude. Further down the hall, past the restrooms and the empty Sunday School classrooms, she turned the corner once and arrived at the perfect destination. Just out of reach.

The hallway was wide, probably around ten feet or so, and stretched far back into the bowels of the building. She could barely make out the faint glow of the red EXIT sign at the end. After glancing around to ensure that she was alone, she tossed her purse on the dark blue tile. Several coins escaped from the side pocket, clinking loudly on the floor. They spun and scattered around her feet in a frantic dance. She leaned against the wall, pressing her back flat against the cold whiteness. Gripping her skirt to prevent it from riding up, she slowly slid down the wall until she was sitting on the floor.

Much better. The air was cooler, devoid of human breath and therefore much more suitable, in her opinion.

Death always brought out the best in people, she'd often heard, but the thought made her cringe. Even if this *was* the best these people had to offer, it wasn't good enough. Not for her, and certainly not for her father, a man who deserved more than this, more than being put on display for a parade of long-lost relatives to gawk at.

She leaned over, neatly plucking each runaway coin between her forefinger and thumb, one at a time, before sliding it back into her purse. She held the last coin, a quarter, between her fingers and rolled it over several times, examining it. The barest hint of a smile graced her lips for the first time that day as memories flooded back.



The television spoke softly in the background, informing the mass audience of exciting new products and services. Light from her father's brass desk lamp splayed out across the room. The ceiling fan spun a gentle breeze overhead. Papers scraped against each other as he shuffled each stack, placing them carefully on his desk. It was a familiar scene. In all her eleven years, she could recall very few evenings when this scene *didn't* take place. She stood quietly in the doorway, observing him.

He felt her gaze and looked up, eyebrows raised. "Hey, Izzy."

She shuffled toward him, her socks making a gentle swishing noise against the floor. "Hey. What are you doing?"

"Grading some papers." He held up one of the stacks for her inspection. "What are *you* doing?"

"Nothing." She stuck her hands in the back pockets of her jeans, thumbs hanging out. She stood in front of his desk, studying the nameplate that sat boldly on top of it, right next to the small stuffed tiger she'd given him when she was five. **Dr. Jonathan Atkins** was etched on the plate in gold.

"If you're bored, you can do me a favor..." he hinted, tapping a red pen against the desk, the clicks forming a familiar rhythm. Three long taps, two short ones.

"Um, okay." She took her hands out and matched his rhythm by lightly patting her own legs.

"I'm going to the bank tomorrow. I've got a big jar of change that needs to be rolled... Interested?"

She shrugged amiably. "Sure."

He smiled, standing up from his desk and walking briskly into the other room. "I'll go get it."

She ambled over to his desk, lifting papers and observing some of the responses. EXPLAIN THE NATURALISTIC FALLACY was written at the top of each looseleaf page. Underneath this request were various explanations from the students, none of which made very much sense to her. She doubted they made much sense to him, either.

He returned, a large glass jar in one hand, a box full of coin wrappers in the other. He handed them to her and returned to his desk.

She sat on the floor, legs crossed, feet neatly under knees. She upturned the jar, sending a cascade of quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies to the floor. They clinked against each other simultaneously, an ocean of coins crashing against a carpeted beach. The television had settled into a comfortable family sitcom. She listened with half an ear to the show while sorting



the change — nickels with nickels, dimes with dimes. Four metal piles were the results. She opened the box and grabbed a handful of five dollar dime wrappers.

Her father sighed periodically, evidently frustrated by his students' nonsensical answers, or maybe just their lack of effort. The ceiling fan whirled above her, gently ruffling her auburn curls, making them tickle her face. She barely noticed, absorbed in her task, and occasionally brushed a hand across her forehead to push away an errant strand.

She'd finished all the piles except for the largest, the quarters. She leaned back and stretched her hands over her head, yawning loudly. A brief glimpse to her right indicated that her father was still quite irritated by his work.

"Dad?"

"Yes?" He looked up from his paperwork.

"What's a fallacy?" She worked on the quarters, settling into the comfortable rhythm of counting them and making little stacks. Four to a stack. Ten stacks of four. Roll them up. Repeat. Always the same; never more, never less. It was a reassuring routine.

"A fallacy? Well, there are all kinds of them. Non sequitur, hasty generalization, begging the question—"

"No, no," she interrupted, taking the completed rolls and piling them in a triangular shape. "What *are* they? What does it mean?"

"Oh, I see what you're asking." He scribbled a few notes on one of his papers. "A fallacy is an often plausible argument using false or illogical inferences."

She set down another thick roll of quarters, adding it to the pyramid. "In English, please."

He shook his head and laughed, the deep sound rolling easily from his throat. It nearly drowned out the chatter from the television.

"Alright, Izzy. Let me see here... a fallacy is like..." he paused, placing his right index finger against his lips, deep in thought. "Okay. It's an error in a person's thinking. An error that will lead to a conclusion or decision that's wrong."

"Mmm," she said, nodding in affirmation. "I see."

"Well, good. That means you're at least one step ahead of these guys." He lifted some of the papers and lightly smacked them with the back of his hand. "They don't get it at all."

"Why?"

"They don't listen. I could talk 'til my voice gives out and still nothing will get through to them."

"Why won't they listen?"

"I don't know," he sighed. He set down his work and took off his glasses, rubbing his eyes. She paused her quarter-counting and studied him curiously.

"Mom says you work too hard."

He barked a short laugh. "Does she?"

"Yeah."

"She might be right about that," he said thoughtfully.

"But then again, she doesn't get it either. Like the students. She doesn't quite understand. She—" he halted abruptly, looking at his daughter. "Never mind. I shouldn't be telling you this."

"I get it," Isabelle supplied helpfully.

His teeth flashed white, and the laugh lines around his face creased deeply.

"I know, Izzy."

"Good." She pointed to her pyramid. "I'm done."



On any other day, the blank canvas before her would not have been quite so captivating. It was just a wall, after all, and not a very pretty one at that. The white latex paint was chipping, and the baseboard was cracked in several places. Yet it offered her comfort, somehow, so she indulged.

"Oh, Izzy, there you are! I've been looking all over for you!" A barely controlled, hushed voice interrupted the companionable silence between Isabelle and the wall. Swallowing a groan, she slowly opened her eyes and let them rest on the person before her.

Kristen Martin could be described as a tall, fair blonde, although that would be doing her more justice than she deserved. "Tall" was usually associated with slender, while Kristen was just skinny, with long, awkward arms and legs; jutting elbows and wrists. "Fair" was really just a politically correct way of saying "pale." And her hair, although a true natural honey blond, had been abused by numerous failed perms, leaving a dry, frizzy tangle atop her head.

"Hey," Kristen said, her voice considerably calmer. She eased down to the floor next to Isabelle, sitting Indian-style. Her shoes rubbed and squeaked against the tile. Isabelle ignored her.

"Um.... your mother asked me to come check on you," Kristen whispered, as if she were speaking to a child. "She wants to know if you'll come back inside and stand with her."

Isabelle rolled her eyes and looked the other way. Kristen's brow furrowed. "So, have you been out here all this time? Are you okay?"

Nothing.

"My mom was telling me about your dad earlier... They went to school together. She said he was a real nice guy. Smart, too." Kristen bit her lip anxiously, waiting to see what effect this statement produced.

"What else did she say?" Isabelle's voice was eerily calm and even.

"Oh, lots of things. She just talked about what a great guy he was, and how much everyone here will miss him... Izzy, are you okay?"

Isabelle knew her face was slowly fading red; she could feel the heat rising from her throat on up. Gritting her teeth, she scrutinized the nervous girl squirming beside her. The same girl who had scarcely spoken to her all through elementary, junior, and senior high schools, except to borrow a pen or ask for her vote in some school election. Isabelle's mother had probably assumed that "classmate" equated to "friend" and "demographic" was related to "understanding," and that was why this clueless diplomat was here in the first place.



If you ask me if I need anything, I'll scream.

"Well... Izzy, you know, if you need anything, *anything*, just let me know."

*Of course.* "Don't call me that," she said tightly.

"What?" Kristen was thoroughly bewildered.

Isabelle casually unzipped her purse, breaking eye contact. "Izzy. Don't call me that."

"But - I thought that was your nickname. I mean, I've heard your father call you that—"

"Really? And are you my father now?" She pulled out a round, golden compact and flipped it open, poring over her complexion.

"I—" Kristen broke off, her face wavering between confusion and anger. "I was just trying to help."

"Well, you've failed grandly. Congratulations. Now make sure you run back and tell all your friends what a bitch I really am."

Kristen's mouth dropped slightly, revealing a light silver line of metal. Without another word, she leaped up and stalked back down the hall.

"And tell my mother she should have known better!" Isabelle shouted after her. Kristen didn't turn around, choosing instead to scurry out of sight, leaving her alone. The hall was once again empty and quiet.

Finally.



The house was silent, save for the steady hum of the refrigerator and gentle sloshing from the dishwasher. He sat on the couch, back against the armrest, head tilted over. His legs stretched out along the cushions, the day's newspaper spread evenly over his lap.

She flipped another page in her book, yawning lightly. Soft sunlight spilled into the living room, livening up the chocolate-colored couches and cream carpeting. The dark-stained grandfather clock in the corner creaked and clanged loudly three times, startling her father from his nap. She glanced over at him from the easy chair and chuckled. Saturdays were always her favorite day of the week.

Her mother strolled into the living room, placing her hands on the back of the chair. "Another book, Isabelle?" she asked, a hint of reproach in her voice.

"Yep."

"But it's Saturday afternoon. It's beautiful outside."

"I know."

"Well, don't you think you should get out and enjoy it? It won't be warm for very much longer. You could go for a drive..."

She flipped another page. "Nah."

"Well, if you wanted to read, maybe you could go outside and read..."

"I like it in here. It's quiet."

"Isabelle," her mother said, exasperated. "You should get out more. You're sixteen! Enjoy it! One of these days you'll regret spending all your time cooped up in here."

"I doubt it."

During this exchange, her father had been watching them with ill-concealed amusement. He finally spoke up. "Go easy on her, Kate. She can't help it. She gets it from my side of the family. We're all anti-social." He gave her a cheeky grin.

Isabelle smiled gratefully at him. Her mother sighed. "Don't go putting excuses like that in her head, Jon. Why do you always stay in here? Don't you get lonely?" She directed the questions at her daughter.

Isabelle shrugged. "No."

"Just think of all the fantastic, fascinating people out there, just waiting for you to meet them! But you never will, because you spend all your time reading books or doing puzzles."

"I don't like people."

"Isabelle," her mother hissed. "Why not?"

"Oh, lots of reasons. They're unreliable, they're conniving, they're fake... there's more. Do you have an hour to spare?"

Her mother gave her a stony glare before throwing up her hands. "I give up. You talk to her, Jon." She turned and walked back into the kitchen.

"Well, that was an encouraging speech," Isabelle mumbled.

"Think not those faithful who praise all thy words and actions, but those who kindly reprove thy faults. Socrates."

Yet another wisdom from her father's endless supply. She squinted her eyes and cocked her head to the right. "So what the hell does that mean?"

"Izzy," he warned.

She sighed. "Heck. What the *heck* does that mean?"

He set his paper down and lowered his feet to the floor. He faced her, elbows on knees. He was wearing his lecture face. She tossed her book aside and locked her fingers together, placing them in her lap, facing him with her eyes and ears open.

"It all boils down to the truth. Wouldn't you rather hear that instead of sweet lies, even if it hurts a little? Just tell it like it is, Isabelle," he said, wagging his index finger at her. "Don't try to sugarcoat it. People want, no, make that *need*, the Truth, not some sweet, easy-to-swallow imitation of the truth."

"Jonathan! Not this again! It's got nothing to do with her!" Her mother had returned to the living room, much to the surprise of the father and daughter. "You're really stuck on that, aren't you? Honestly, you two are just alike. I just don't get it." That said, she left the room for good. Her footsteps thudded lightly as she walked upstairs.

They remained quiet for a moment, neither wanting to speak first. Finally Isabelle broke the silence. "I get it. Go on."

He nodded, looking relieved, and proceeded to explain to her, little by little and in great detail, why the lack of veracity in the human race would eventually lead to its demise.



She nodded each time he paused for reassurance; not bothering to tell him that he had just discussed this with her quite thoroughly last Thursday. Maybe no one else was willing to listen, but *she* was, and that was all that mattered.



The wall was made of cement blocks, reminiscent of an old college dorm room or a random classroom at the high school. Although, strangely enough, the blocks were square. She couldn't recall ever seeing perfect lines of square cinder block; they were usually rectangular in fashion. Square. Probably a foot on a side. One square foot in area. It would be easy to figure how big the wall was, she decided, with those square blocks. Starting in the lower left-hand corner where the wall began, she started to count.

One, two, three, four...

She reached the end of the first row, and the last block had been cruelly cut in half. No, not even half, but more than a third. Two fifths, maybe. All along the doorframe where the wall ended, up to the ceiling, was a tall, thin line of vertically sliced blocks. She debated on how to include them in the count, and decided to leave that line for the end.

"Isabelle, I'm glad I found you. I'd like to talk to you for a second."

*Not again.* She reluctantly looked away from her task. The soft, barely masculine voice came from a middle-aged man squatting just to her left. She first saw the shine of his head, an oily beacon of light peeking through the thin strands of his comb-over. A thick set of gray wire-rimmed glasses perched atop his pug nose. A wide bristle-brush mustache formed an inverted V over his lips, and stretched as he spoke.

"How do you feel? He asked, shifting his weight to accommodate his belly." *Why does everyone keep asking me that?* She chose not to respond.

"I know this is a tough time for you. Your father was a good man, a good professor, and a good friend of mine."

How lovely. And I suppose now you'll have to relate some heartwarming tale about him.

"Why, I remember the first day he walked into my office, I think he had to borrow a stapler or something—"

She shut him out, staring mutely. The man was familiar, and she had a niggling feeling that she should at least know his name. But then again, most middle-aged men tended to look and act just alike, especially her father's colleagues, so she could very well be mistaken. But still...

"Who are you?" she interrupted. The man smiled, allowing his lips to curve up enough until a thin row of neglected teeth could be seen. She shuddered.

"I'm Bryan Maze. We've met before, but it's been a while, so I guess you don't remember. I worked with your father. Anyway, your uncle sent me to find you... the service is about to start."

"The service," she repeated slowly. That meant a eulogy. A speech, given by some stranger whose religious occupation bade him do so, full of nice words and half-truths. The preacher didn't know her father, since they never actually attended church, yet he would tell the world the man's life story as told to him by others. The Disney version of it, anyway. It would be cleaned and bleached, all the dark blotches removed, then buffed and polished to eliminate irregularities and rough edges. A flawless, shiny, smooth life. An illusion of perfection. A fallacy.

Jonathan Atkins was human, and humans are not perfect. Ergo, he was not perfect.

And he would have hated this deceptive ritual.

"It's been such a nice ceremony, hasn't it?" murmured the man. "So beautiful. And all the flowers!" He clucked sympathetically. "He really meant a lot to everyone here."

"He would have hated this."

Silence. Then, "Excuse me?"

"This. This stupid play that's being put on for the world, where we're all just acting our part until the storm passes. They should charge a fucking admission to this circus." She leaned forward, clutching the hem of her skirt. Her voice rose. "Tomorrow we'll all congratulate ourselves for never letting down our guard, never telling people how we *really* felt or what we *really* remembered about him. He would have hated it, *condemned* it, even..." She paused for breath, her face burning. "That's why we never went to funerals. He couldn't stand the hypocrisy. Why doesn't anyone *get* this?"

He leaned back warily, as one might lean from a fire that burns too brightly. "Well, young lady, I think if your father were here right now, he would certainly appreciate all that we've—"

"No he wouldn't!!!" she shouted, her hoarse voice bouncing off the white, square-blocked wall, giving it a power she didn't know it was capable of. "That's bullshit! If he was such a good friend to you then you would *know*!"

He stared at her, clearly irritated by her candor, before struggling to a standing position. He adjusted his dark gray jacket and straightened his tie, giving her a meaningful glare.

"If you'll excuse me, I am going to go back inside for the service that was so thoughtfully provided."

"Good riddance. And enjoy the show."



Thirty blocks across. Eleven blocks up and down. That made 330 blocks. Three hundred and thirty square feet, with a little extra, if you counted that annoying line of sliced blocks. Eleven of those. Eleven times two fifths was... Hell, she never could get the hang of fractions.

She reached for her purse again, digging around inside until her hand grasped the package she was looking for. She pulled out the



Marlboros and a lighter, carefully choosing the next victim from the pack. She placed the smooth white cylinder between her lips and lit it, drawing it in slowly until it caught and burned. A bittersweet scent filled her nostrils, and the smoke rolled lazily down her throat. She gently blew it out a moment later, watching the light gray wisps dissipate in the air.

She let her head roll back and thump gently on the blocks behind her. She could hear the deep, rolling voice of the preacher, back in the sanctuary, begin his remarks. Amid his mumblings and the sound of her own breath, she caught another noise. Footsteps.

Third time's a charm.

She turned her head to the left, waiting to see the next ambassador they'd sent for her. A moment later, he appeared. Tall, dark-haired, and surprisingly young. He was wearing a red button-down shirt and loose Khakis. Her eyes followed his form as he turned, stopped, and studied her. Shrugging, he walked over and slouched down the wall beside her.

He produced a cigarette of his own from seemingly nowhere. "Got a light?"

Wordlessly, she handed it over. She watched as he lit it and took a long draw, inhaling and exhaling with practiced ease, his face relaxing visibly. He seemed in no hurry to speak, and her curiosity nearly got the best of her. She held her ground and fought the urge to say anything. His knees were drawn up to his chest, eyes closed, right hand loosely holding his smoke. The end of it burned bright orange, and ashes started to build up. She considered telling him before they spilled onto his red shirt, but those words wouldn't come. Others came in their place.

"What's eleven times two fifths?"

He opened his eyes, focusing on something even she could not see. He didn't laugh or ask why she wanted to know.

"Four and two fifths," he said finally, nodding slowly.

"Four and two fifths," she murmured. Three hundred thirty-four and two fifths square feet. "Thanks."

"No problem."

They sat side by side, barely moving except to lift a cigarette or inhale. Smoke curled elegantly through the air. Down the hall, the preacher's voice rumbled on. She could feel the low, bass-like tremors of his voice through the floor.

"Jonathan Atkins was one of those men whom everyone liked. A man who could make someone better simply by being around them. He was a caring father and husband, a professor who was loved by his students, an involved member of the community..."

"Bullshit," she muttered, angrily stabbing her cigarette against the floor before pulling another from the pack.

The young man next to her gave a rueful half-smile. "The gods, too, are fond of a joke." He flicked some of his ashes away. "I forget who said that."

"Aristotle."

"Yeah," he said. "Aristotle." Using his free hand, he beckoned to the ceremony down the hall. "He would have hated this."

"I know."

He glanced over at her questioningly. She attempted to avert his gaze by examining her hand, the floor, the wall, anything in the opposite direction. But he was patient, and eventually he won out. She turned to

face him and he stuck out his hand.

"Eric Blackburn. Former student."

She studied his face for a long moment before slowly raising her right hand and clasping it with his.

"Isabelle Atkins. Daughter."

His eyes widened a little and he nodded, as if no further explanation was necessary.

"He touched the lives of everyone he met..."

She snorted. Eric chuckled and spoke. "I remember once, this guy kept falling asleep and snoring in class... Dr. Atkins had woken him once already, but the guy was asleep again... he got so pissed he threw an eraser at him."

Isabelle smiled and leaned forward, picking absently at the sleeve of her blouse. "He never could remember their anniversary."

"He lost my midterm paper once."

"He was always late."

"Yeah," he chuckled. "Yeah, he was."

She settled back and relaxed, placing her hands in her lap and ignoring the shudders through the floor. A group of soft, synchronized voices began reciting the Lord's prayer.

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..."

She shivered at the eerie, unsettling sound. She imagined all the blue and black suits and dresses with their heads lowered, chanting the words. Her father's first captive audience. What a shame it had to come now.

"Amen." Sniffles. One broken wail. The sound of shoes scraping against cheap blue carpet. It was over.

Eric squashed his cigarette on the ground. The ashes scattered and danced across the floor. Gray against dark blue. "Thanks for the light," he said as he stood up, brushing away stray debris from his pants. Her gaze settled on his old brown boots as he started to walk away.

"Wait." She clambered to her feet, stomping her cigarette and adjusting her skirt at the same time. He turned, his face open and questioning.

She hesitated. "I'm done. Wait for me."

He smiled then; easy, sincere, honest. Her own lips followed suit as she walked after him, glancing back at the wall only once as she left.